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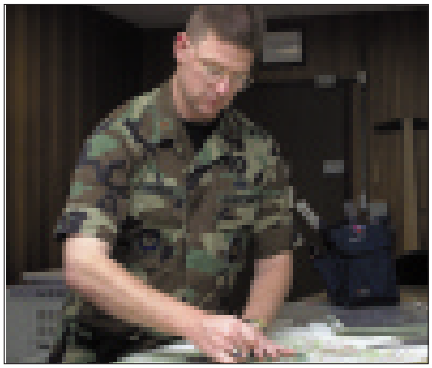
Intelligence pays off for officer

Local major wins annual award

By Staff Sgt. Rich Romero
52nd Fighter Wing public affairs

Air Force officials this week presented the Maj. Gen. Jack E. Thomas Award for 1999 to a Spangdahlem Air Base officer in Washington, D.C.

Maj. Scott "Dutch" Murray, 52nd Operations Support Squadron intelligence flight chief, and his wife, Jolande, traveled to the National Military Intelligence Association Annual Awards Banquet for the presentation. The award has been given since 1987 to a deserving Air Force intelligence member as a testimony of professional excellence and exceptional dedication to duty, according to NMIA officials.



Senior Airman Esperanza Berrios

Maj. Scott Murray, 52nd Operations Support Squadron intelligence flight chief, plots a target on a map.

"In no particular order, God, family and country is what it's all about," Murray said of receiving the award. "It certainly ranks as a proud achievement. That said, at the core-level, it's just another opportunity to represent the efforts and achieve-ments of those who have and continue to work for me."

His leadership as intelligence chief for two different air expeditionary wings during Operation Allied Force primarily led to his selection, according to Lt. Col. Carey Stegall, 52nd OSS commander.

"During NATO's most demanding test to date, Major Murray lead all aspects of pre-mission intelligence support, post-mission reporting and bomb damage assessment to the largest wing ever assembled (the 31st Air Expeditionary Wing) in Air Force history and the most geographically dispersed wing in OAF (the 52nd AEW)," Stegall said. "Tirelessly dedicated to taking care of his subordinates, his exemplary leadership and intelligence skills saved aircrew lives and were nothing short of

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CCAF graduates earn AFA grants

By Melissa Borsic
52 FW education center

Two Community College of the Air Force graduates received $400 Eagle Grant Award checks from the Air Force Association during the local spring graduation ceremony April 27.

Tech. Sgts. Conrad O'Rourke, 52nd Medical Support Squadron, and Jason Stachowski, 22nd Fighter Squadron, were presented the grants, given by the AFA to encourage Air Force enlisted members to continue their education, according to Master Sgt. Lance Wade, AFA Chapter 534 secretary.

Eagle Grant Awards are given to CCAF graduates who intend to pursue bachelor degrees and are awarded based upon the "total person" concept, he said. The awards are endowed by the Aerospace Education Foundation through corporate contributions and donations from the AFA.

Forty-nine other Eifel members graduated during the spring ceremony. They are:

Master sergeants

Craig Barrows, George Bartow, John Foster, David Gutschow, Gary Hamm, Donnie Henderson, Sadie Knight, Neal Moser, Randy Richardson, Donald Williams and Ricky Wriston.

Technical sergeants

Robert Beckman, Nora Byas, Quinton Fawbush, Kevin Haldeman, William Magboo Jr., Steven Miller, Stefan Watkins and William Wolf.

Staff sergeants

Frederick Beck, Timothy Boney, Paul Burden, Sandra Butler, Gene Eastman, Matthew Fiscus, Carlton Francis, Travis Gray, Bridgett Jones, Ted Kummet, Patrick Lathrop, William Little, Christopher Miller, Dawn Miller, Darin Mitchell, Jeffrey Quick, Wilson Sagendorph III, Thomas Schrack Jr., Barry Snyder Jr., Deanna Solgat, Bruce Tuttle, Douglas Wright and Jose Zapataayala.

Senior airmen

Tiffany Bergthold, Francis Edge, Michael Meinhold, Sean Rawles, Irene Sanders, Nelson Santiago and Jeremy Stover.

From reenlistments to retirements, Thomas, MaeBelle and Scott Hardin's service to their country has become sort of a

Family tradition

By 1st Lt. Angela Johnson
52nd FW public affairs

Courtesy photo

1st Lt. Angela Johnson

At left, Thomas Hardin, second from left in the back row, with the crew of his B-17 in Europe. Above, retired Maj. Thomas Hardin reenlists his son, Master Sgt. Scott Hardin in the 52nd Fighter Wing inspector general's office May 5.

Fully clad in his 1962 dress uniform, retired Maj. Thomas Hardin raised his right hand May 5 to reenlist.

Actually, he was reenlisting his son, Master Sgt. Scott Hardin, for the second and possibly last time in the NCO's 20-year career. Scott is assigned to the 52nd Fighter Wing inspector general office. MaeBelle Hardin, Scott's mother and a former control tower operator in the Women's Army Corps, also took part in the ceremony.

Making careers out of the Air Force has become sort of a family tradition. His father retired from the service in 1962 after 21 1/2 years. Mom served as a WAC for 4 1/2 years before marrying Thomas.

Enlisting in the Army Air Corps in February 1941, Thomas quickly climbed the ranks from private to staff sergeant in only 10 days. Originally a radio operator mechanic earning $21 a month, he received orders in January 1942 to the Air Corps Pilot Training Center. He was selected for pilot training under the then new enlisted pilot program, also know as "flying sergeants."

He was one of 2,143 men to graduate as sergeant pilots, now earning $72 a month. He finished advanced training to fly bombers in September 1942.

After the sergeant pilot program was abolished in December 1942, Thomas along with the other sergeant pilots were promoted to the rank of flight officer.

"There was no official rank for a flight officer, a grade comparable to a warrant officer," he said. "We used second lieutenant bars and added blue scotch tape to them to create our rank." Eventually, an official rank replaced the make-shift insignia.

With World War II raging in Europe, Thomas volunteered for B-17 training.

"I was young, foolish and a volunteer," he said. "I had orders to B-17 training, but those were rescinded because I was a flight officer." At the time, flight officers weren't allowed to pilot four-engine aircraft. As a result, a second lieutenant was sent in his place.

Not only did the restrictive policies of the old Army Air Corps initially keep Thomas out of a B-17 cockpit, it also kept MaeBelle from heading overseas to contribute to the war effort.

"I volunteered to join the Women's Air Corps and for duty in Europe during the war, but they didn't use women air traffic controllers overseas," MaeBelle said. "I stayed in Texas and worked in the training command."

While MaeBelle (having not yet met Thomas) served her country throughout the war in Texas, Thomas did eventually make it to Europe. Earning a commission as a second lieutenant finally landed him in a B-17G Flying Fortress in which he flew 35 combat missions with the 303rd Bomb Group "Hells Angels" from Royal Air Force Molesworth, England.

One of those missions — the 29th – stands out in his mind. His Flying Fortress was hit repeatedly by enemy gunfire, knocking out one engine. With hydraulic and control lines severed, fluid was spewing everywhere.

"We couldn't stay with our formation," he said. "I considered bailing out and told my crew to be ready, then I decided to try and make it to the English Channel. Fortunately the engine froze up and the reduction gears gave way so the prop could windmill. We managed to land at Molesworth, late, but safe."

After landing, the crew counted the number of holes in the B-17 – more than 200. Thomas and his crew were fortunate that time and throughout the other 34 missions. Not one of the nine-member crew received so much as a scratch.

After 35 missions and logging 265 combat hours, he returned to the states after the war. While he then learned to fly the B-29, there was no war left to fight and his flying time was cut to about four hours a month.

An enormous number of people left the Army Air Force after the war and Thomas was no exception. He jumped ship Dec. 9, 1945, as a first lieutenant. Because so many people were leaving the service, former officers were eventually offered a chance to reenlist as master sergeants.

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Tradition

So, Thomas returned to the Air Corps 20 days later as a master sergeant.

As a crew chief for the AT-6 and B-25 at Randolph Field, Texas, Thomas met MaeBelle in March 1946. She was a staff sergeant at the time. "We met in the club the night I reported for duty," MaeBelle said.

They were married in the base chapel at Boca Raton, Fla., where Thomas was transferred for radar operator/mechanic training.

"After we got married, I put in my discharge papers," MaeBelle said. "At the time, you couldn't be married and both in the military because there wasn't a good program to keep you together."

Completing school in late 1947, he was offered a competitive tour – one year as an officer for the purpose of obtaining a regular Air Force commission. In February 1948, he received his commission in the new U.S. Air Force.

During the next 14 years, Thomas was both a communications officer and a pilot because of his background. Ultimately, he retired as a major in 1962. He continued his flying career as a corporate pilot and accumulated more than 14,000 flying hours before hanging up his wings in 1982.

Although Thomas was a combat pilot during the war and came close to bailing out of his aircraft a couple times, it was MaeBelle who actually had the misfortune of becoming a member of the Caterpillar Club – a club for people who bailed out of an aircraft to save their life.

During Mother's Day weekend in May 1945, MaeBelle had to leap out of an AT-6. She was taking a "hop" and was on her way back after visiting her parents in Alabama.

"It was a stormy night and we got lost over Texas in bad weather," she said. "Then the radio went out." The pilot flew around for a couple of hours trying to find his way, but gas was running low.

"We were lost so long that the pilot told me we might have to jump," MaeBelle said. "He waited until the last minute to make the call because he was unsure I would jump if it came to that."

At 2:30 a.m., with no prior training, MaeBelle stood up in her seat. "The pilot told me to kick against the fuselage as I went over so I would clear the plane," she said. "I just kinda went over and pulled the ripcord.

"My chute didn't feel right on the way down. I looked at it and both of the shoulder straps were on the same shoulder; I had gone through the upper part of the harness. The thought crossed my mind that I had to put this on right. I reached down and started to unbuckle my harness before I came to my senses and realized I just needed to hang on tight."

The pilot and MaeBelle landed on the edge of a swamp in Hugo, Okla. "We were dinged up a bit, but didn't break anything," she said.

MaeBelle said she was a little scared to fly after that, but it didn't stop her. "I flew home a week later to show my parents I was still in one piece," she said.

As a sign of pride in MaeBelle and her sister (a former WAVES -- Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service in the Navy), a two-star flag hung in her parent's home. Since Scott has two children of his own, some day a similar flag may hang from his home, a symbol of a family tradition of military service.

Award

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spectacular."

As the senior intelligence officer, Murray was responsible for ensuring all aircrews stepped to fly their missions with the best Serbian intelligence analysis, assessments and support.

"Most importantly, it had to be information they trusted implicitly without questions," said Murray, a U.S. Air Force Fighter Weapons School graduate. "Lives were at stake every single day."

One of the on-the-job challenges he faced during Allied Force was convincing higher headquarters to use intelligence information that could be provided after combat missions were complete – whether weapons system video or electronic intelligence.

"Technology allowed for unit-level intelligence to become primary sources of critical information to the overall war effort," Murray said. "This was a drastic change from Operation Desert Storm 10 years ago."

On a more personal level, he said controlling his emotions during intense periods such as the two successful combat search and rescue efforts to retrieve downed pilots and the few occurrences of collateral damage when bombs went astray proved challenging.

"Daily, the toughest of all challenges I faced was to tell people to leave work and got get some rest," he said. "My people literally were working themselves into the ground. I had to take care of each and every one of them. I wasn't immune either. Making myself go back to the hotel or home to get some sleep took some doing."

The intelligence field has proven rewarding for Murray, who had another path in mind while at the Air Force Academy. During his freshman year at the Academy, he suffered a neck injury that disqualified him as a pilot.

"Given that, I wanted to choose a career field that ensured I could smell JP-4 (at the time, now JP-8) fuel every day and directly support those who are called upon to go into harm's way in the Air Force – namely aircrew members," he said. "The intelligence career field has certainly given me that opportunity, and then some."

What's next for the "combat-proven" leader of "the most dedicated group of intelligence officers, NCOs and airmen," as Murray refers to his team, whom he feels strongly about ensuring they know that.

"I have a coffee cup that reads, 'Just another day of winging it.' Every day is different and the challenges are many," he said. "I enjoy going to work each day and say, 'Bring it on.'"